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STEPHEN THE GREAT OF MOL- DAVIA AND THE TURKISH INVASION (1457-1504).¹

IN his second edition (1924) of *A history of the art of war in the Middle Ages* ² Professor Sir Charles Oman writes :

"Christendom was blessed in the middle and later years of the fifteenth century with a succession of champions such as she had not before known. John Huniades, the great Hungarian Regent (1444-56), and his son, King Matthias Corvinus (1458-90), succeeded in keeping the line of the Danube intact, though they could not prevent Serbia, Bosnia, and the other trans-Danubian lands, from falling again into Turkish servitude. And John Castriot (Scanderbeg), the indomitable Albanian mountaineer, beat off every attack on his upland principality till his death in 1467. It was mainly owing to the personalities of those three great men that the Ottoman power, though guided by Sultans of exceptional capacity, was held in check."

On the other hand in the January, 1923, issue of *History*,³ Professor R. W. Seton-Watson, in an article on Roumanian origins, writes :

"Speaking quite broadly about Europe's defence against the Turks, we may say that in the second half of the fourteenth century the van was led by Serbia, in the first half of the fifteenth by Hungary, and in the second half by Roumania. The career of Stephen the Great, who ruled Moldavia from 1457 to 1504, is certainly the least known episode of the Turkish advance westward ; and yet he stands beside Hunyady, Sobieski and Eugene as one of the first champions of Christendom. His whole attitude and his sometimes equivocal policy, is dominated by Moldavia's geographical plight—condemned to a triangular game between Turkey, Hungary and Poland. During the most critical periods, the two latter Powers were more concerned to impose their sovereignty on Moldavia than to give effective military aid ; and on one occasion money contributed by the Pope was diverted to Matthias of Hungary as claiming to

¹ This article is based on the author's "Studies of the way in which Stephen the Great made war" (*Studii asupra chipului cum se făptuia războiul de către Stefan-cel-Mare*), published in the *Annals of the Roumanian Academy* (Third Series, Tom. IV., pp. 367-444 ; Tom. VI., pp. 1-71).

² Page 355.

³ Pp. 254-55.

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be Stephen's suzerain. Thus Stephen had to play a double game, sacrificing everything to the paramount need of securing foreign aid against the Turk. His greatest triumph was in 1475, when, faced with Mahomet's demand for personal submission in Constantinople, he gave battle to the Turks at Rahova and routed them with enormous losses. But his ever recurring efforts to organise a Christian League were undermined by the suspicion and distrust which separated Moldavia from Poland and Hungary, and again Poland from Lithuania and Moscow. On his death-bed in 1504 he appears to have advised his son to make his submission to the Turks. After holding them at bay for fifty years, he felt the hopelessness of the Christian rally. Stephen was equally gifted as a warrior and an administrator but he was the last of the heroic breed."

The *Cambridge Medieval History*¹ also states:

"For the rest of the century Stephen (the Great) overshadowed the petty rulers of the sister-principality (Wallachia), and became the leading spirit of resistance to the Turks in Eastern Europe. His father² had, indeed, paid tribute to them as far back as 1456; but he completely routed them at the battle of Rahova in 1475, the first time that a Turkish and Moldavian army had met. Europe applauded his success; but, after in vain trying to form a league of the Christian Powers against the enemy, he realised at the end of his long reign that his efforts had only postponed the necessity of recognising the suzerainty of the Sultan."

The contradictions in the views held on this important point of history must be puzzling to any English reader who wants to know something about the stemming of the Turkish advance westwards, at the end of the Middle Ages. On the other hand, so far as I know, Stephen the Great's resistance to the Turkish attack has not yet been described in English.

It is with the intention of clearing up the contradiction in the views of the eminent historians cited above and to show how Moldavia resisted the Turkish onslaught, that the following study is presented to English readers, whose indulgence is asked for, in a first essay, written in a language which is not the author's mother tongue.

Mohammed II.'s conquest of Constantinople in 1453 confirmed the definite installation of the Turks in the Balkan Peninsula, in the place of the Byzantine Empire, which had reigned there for over a thousand years. By this installation two utterly different civilisations came into conflict, on the Danube and in the Eastern Mediterranean. On one side, a new power having all the vigour and quest for glory of a young, homogeneous, powerful and fanatic organisation, led by a youthful and ambitious

¹ IV., p. 588.

² Stephen's predecessor, Peter Aron, who first paid tribute to the Turks, was not his father but his uncle, who had come to the throne by killing Stephen's father (1451).

chief, who not only shone in the rays of the victory of 29 May, 1453, but, cultured, with a will of iron, a capable diplomat, an efficient soldier, utterly devoid of any scruples, had set himself the task of following up the victorious advance towards the west of Europe, begun by his predecessors.

On the other hand the old Europe, whose states, after long vicissitudes, were scarcely beginning to consolidate, possessed no central political Power, while the spiritual Power was weak, and owing principally to its own faults had found only a very feeble hearing in its repeated appeals for support against the unbelievers. In these conditions it was impossible to set on foot any united action, and the whole weight of resistance fell on those who were in immediate contact with the Turks, for these neighbours of the Ottoman Empire had not only to defend a principle, but were obliged above all to defend their own existence.

The Turkish danger was not only religious and political, but also, and chiefly, economic. Two land communications served, in those times, for the exchange of goods between the East and the manufacturing centres of Western Europe. One of these communications, passing through Lwow (Lemberg) led through Moldavia to the northern coast of the Black Sea at Chilia, Cetatea Albă and Caffa, while the second followed the Danube to Belgrade and from thence on to Salonica and Constantinople. By the establishment of the Turks in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the Black Sea, as well as by their arrival on the Danube, the outlets of both these land communications, and of that by sea, were in Turkish hands, and all exchange ceased. If this was a heavy blow to the industry and commerce of Western Europe (from which they were able to recuperate, thanks only to the fact that new outlets were found towards America in 1492 and India in 1498), for the countries in the valley of the Danube, through which the whole traffic passed and which lived by this traffic, the Turkish domination of the outlets meant economic death, followed by political subjugation. The countries which were in direct contact with the Turks, in the second half of the 15th century were: Venice, Albania, Hungary, Wallachia and Moldavia, in Europe; Persia, under the leadership of Uszun Hassan, in Asia.

These were the circumstances under which the throne of Moldavia was occupied, in the spring of 1457, by a young Prince, Stephen, whose long and glorious reign of forty-seven years brought him the surname of "the Great." On his accession to the throne, the young Sovereign was at once faced by the ques-

tion of his attitude towards the Turks. Was he to submit and pay a tribute, as his weak predecessor had done, or was he to resist the Mohammedan advance? Although he could expect but little help from his neighbours, who proved to be extremely jealous of him,¹ he decided on the second course; and when we think of the conditions in South Eastern Europe at that time, we see that it would have been difficult to choose any other solution. The principal reasons were as follows:

(a) If the fall of Constantinople made a deep impression, especially in the West of Europe (for the Eastern nations had long been accustomed to see in the Christian Emperor on the Bosphorus only a powerless symbol), a very great and deep impression was also caused by the victories of Hunyády and especially by his brilliant defence of Belgrade in 1456,² which proved to the Christians of South Eastern Europe that it was possible to oppose a victorious resistance even to the conqueror of Constantinople. Coming to the throne immediately after this victory, if we take his character into consideration, was it not natural for Stephen to be carried away by the flow of confidence in a Christian triumph which followed the victory of Belgrade?

(b) The conflict in which Moldavia was engaged, owing to her geographical situation and to general conditions, was not an ordinary conflict which could be solved by negotiations, but it was a conflict of two nations, whose religious and political organisations, aims and economic status, were not only different but even opposed, the one aiming at the subjugation and exploitation of the world for its own benefit, while the other had in view the defence of its faith and its existence. Hence sooner or later the conflict was inevitable.

(c) Endowed by nature with intelligence, energy, prudence and a highly developed sense of the beautiful, modest and devoid of haughtiness, untiring and never despairing even in the midst of unfavourable circumstances, knowing how to set an example of hard work and courage on the battlefield, ready to sacrifice his personal sentiments, Stephen impressed his personality on all contemporaries and made himself loved by his subjects, thanks to the good husbandry of his reign, and to the fact that though quick-tempered he knew how to forgive and was just and generous.

¹ Perche non solamente non me hano aiutato, ma forai alcuni hano avuto piacer del danno fato a mi et al dominio mio da infideli (Stephen to the Venetian Senate, *Deliberazioni secrete del Senato* (8 May, 1478). Reg. 28, c. 13).

² Długosz, *Opera Omnia* (ed. Przewdziecki, XIV., p. 226).

Predominating all these qualities, his deep love for his ancestral land, his judicious appreciation of situations and possibilities, his ability in diplomatic negotiations together with a very deep and real Christian sentiment, made it impossible for Stephen to accept the policy of subjugation to the power which represented for him the very contrary of his own most intimate feelings and aspirations. If Stephen, in the interest of his country, resolved to resist the Turkish attack, he never thought of becoming the champion of other people's causes or of attempting the expulsion of the Moslems from Europe to the advantage of others. Too prudent not to weigh the means, both his and those of the Turkish Empire, too wise to have confidence in the words of the Pope and of other Christian Princes, he never sought conquest and aimed only at defending the existence of his own country.

Before following the military operations, by which Stephen opposed the onrush of the Turks, we may summarise the means at his disposal.

The organisation of the Moldavian army was¹ derived from the social and political organisation of the country: at the head of the hierarchy was the reigning prince, who had succeeded to the throne either by heritage, election or by civil war, and whose power was limited only by the fear that too many abuses on his part would bring a host of followers to the side of one of the numerous pretenders, who were always to be found sheltering in the neighbouring countries, if not indeed among his own advisers. Except for this reservation, the only rules which guided the Prince were those of old tradition and his own pleasure. Under the Prince, depending on his good will, but imposing itself on him by the power which the organisation of the rural property gave him, there was to be found a privileged class, the *cneji*, from which the higher dignitaries—the *boiars*—were recruited. This class was accustomed from father to son to govern and to make war and, generally speaking, it was well-to-do. Last came the great mass of the peasantry which, if it did not own the land, had by ancient custom the legal right to till the soil and was free as to person and property. The possession and the legal usufruct of the ground had as a corollary, for all those who benefited by this ownership or usufruct, the obligation to defend the national soil. On this obligation was based the recruitment of the Moldavian army. It provided both the mass of the soldiers as well as the *cadres*, formed by the landowners and territorial officials. This

¹ *Annals of the Roumanian Academy*, Series III., Tom. IV., pp. 386-403, 442-43.

obligation assured to the army its great homogeneity in time of war, though the army only came into being on mobilisation—the peasant soldier passing from the plough to the battlefield without changing his neighbours or his leaders. To these territorial forces which, in the time of Stephen the Great, formed the overwhelming majority of the army, were added a personal guard recruited from a class of privileged landowners and some, very few, mercenaries.

Practically the whole army was mounted, Moldavia's resources in horseflesh being very great. This assured to it a great mobility but did not transform it into cavalry, as the horse was used by the majority of the Moldavian troops as a means of locomotion only, and not on the battlefield, where everyone fought on foot. There existed no organisation corresponding to to-day's army service corps, and convoys were limited to a small number of carriages, as the peasant soldiers were obliged by law to bring their food with them, and, as was the practice in the whole of Europe, the entire army lived on the resources found in the theatre of war. If the administrative and especially the medical services were practically non-existent, on the other hand there was a very complete and efficacious intelligence service.

The total effective of the Moldavian army, under Stephen the Great, was fifty to sixty thousand men, a very high percentage (the total population of the country probably not exceeding 50,000 families), which was due to the fact that, as shown above, Moldavia obliged every man capable of bearing arms to come in case of need: a call to which the peasant answered readily, as it was in his interest to defend the social and political organisation which assured him sufficient ground for tilling and satisfactory conditions of life. This percentage was much higher than that of the neighbouring Polish and Hungarian states. It explains also how a small state like Moldavia could, for some time at least, oppose a successful resistance to such a mighty organisation as the Turkish army.

As to armament,¹ that used by the Moldavians in the second half of the 15th century was, generally speaking, of a very light type, analogous to that employed by the Tartars. It consisted of shields, generally made of wicker-work; defensive clothing, consisting of padded garments and not of metal or leather armour as used by other contemporaries; clubs, which were used by every fighting man; axes, scythes and hooks, swords, lances and

¹ *Annals of the Roumanian Academy*, Series III., Tom. IV., pp. 369–84, 441.

javelins, bows, mostly of the very light eastern type, and cross-bows, as well as rudimentary fire-arms. The majority of this armament was manufactured by those who used it: (peasants who, when called to arms, were not provided with their own swords, bows and arrows, were beheaded). Gunpowder, lead, iron, fire-arms and part of the other armament were imported, principally from Lwow (Lemberg) and Brasov.

The analysis of contemporary and ulterior documents and annals shows us that the tactical principles, current in the Moldavian army of that epoch were: ¹

(a) Long and rapid marches.

(b) A permanent and judicious use of van (with rear and flank) guards, outposts and reconnaissances, the latter completing the work of the very efficient intelligence service already mentioned.

(c) Choice, for the battle, of rough and covered ground in order to prevent the enemy from using his numerical superiority or of employing his cavalry. On the battlefield, which was generally fortified, a small part of the forces, and especially those using missile-throwing weapons (*armes de jet*) were first deployed, in order to wear out and disorganise the adversary; afterwards came the shock of a powerful mass, which had remained carefully hidden up to the propitious moment.

Like other peasant peoples—the Swiss and the Czechs, for example—the Moldavians were obliged to fight on foot; but while the Swiss and the Czechs, in order to stop the cavalry of the enemy, had resort to massive formations or to the Wagenburg (Gulai Gorod),² the Moldavians trusted to the lie of the ground and found therein a means of augmenting their effectives and of preventing the enemy from deploying his superior forces and using his cavalry.

On the accession of Stephen the Great, Moldavia comprised a certain number of fortified places ³ which were increased by him and formed towards the middle of his reign a regular system, as follows. First there was a series of fortresses at those points on the frontier where the principal ways of communications entered the country: Crăciuna, Chilia, Cetatea Albă, Orhei, Soroca, Hotin Cecina (Tetina). There was also an interior fortified region, formed by Neamt, Roman and Suceava, which

¹ *Annals of the Roumanian Academy*, Series III., Tom. IV., pp. 411-40, 443-44.

² A strong movable wall of defence, regularly utilised, for instance, by the Russians in their yearly campaigns against the Tartars.—Ed.

³ *Annals of the Roumanian Academy*, Series III., Tom. IV., pp. 1-22, 69.

acted as *reduit* and pivot for strategical manœuvres. This system was completed by the fortification of towns, monasteries and certain country houses. The fortresses were of very small dimensions. They were transformed during the reign of Stephen the Great, so as to resist artillery fire. Each fortress had one or two Governors, who were also the administrators of a considerable area of territory, which furnished the fortress with defenders, workers and provisions.

What we know of the strategy¹ employed by Stephen's predecessors in Moldavia as well as in Wallachia, shows us that it generally consisted in harassing the enemy during his advance into the country and of attracting him towards a strong and well-covered natural position, where the ground allowed the defenders to surprise their adversary and prevented him from deploying his heavy-armed forces. A ruthless pursuit would complete his rout.

At the beginning of his reign, it was in Stephen's interest not to be disturbed by any trouble from outside, until he had strengthened his position and reorganised his military forces. In the meanwhile his predecessor, whom he had driven into Poland, had been obliged in consequence of the treaty of 1459² to quit the Polish realm and had sought a new refuge at the court of Matthias Corvinus, King of Hungary, from whence, by emissaries and other means, he agitated against Stephen. The unfriendliness of Matthias' action in receiving Peter Aron and allowing this agitation, aggravated the latent conflict, which existed between Moldavia and the Hungarian Kings since the emancipation of the former country, a century earlier, from the Hungarian overlordship. John Hunyády had had a very clear vision of the situation when he realised that, the Balkans once passed, the Turks could not be stopped anywhere south of the Danube. In order to make an effective resistance on that river, he had occupied Chilia and strengthened the fortifications of Belgrade, the two cities which governed the principal communications leading from the Balkan peninsula across the Danube to Hungary and Poland,³ and had tried to make out of Moldavia, Wallachia and Serbia, which recognised his suzerainty, buffer states between

¹ *Annals of the Roumanian Academy*, VI., pp. 23-68, 70, 71.

² Between Poland and Moldavia (Bogdan, *Documentele lui Stefan-cel Mare* II., pp. 266-69).

³ "As long as the Roumanians are masters of Chilia and Cetatea Albă and the Hungarians of the Serbian Belgrade, we shall not be able to vanquish the Christians." Opinion of Mohammed II., cited by the Serbian Janissary, extracts of whose (contemporary) narration have been republished by Hâjdău (*Arhiva Istorică a României* I., Part 2, p. 11).

Hungary and the Turks. But the independence of Moldavia, which, as we have seen, was Stephen's aim, would not allow him, whether from a political or from an economic and especially from a military point of view, to leave Chilia in foreign hands. Hence in order to be able to resist, later on, the oncoming Turkish attacks, Stephen was obliged to try and take Chilia, which, after an unsuccessful attack in 1462, he captured in 1465¹ and thus accentuated still further the latent conflict between him and the King of Hungary.

Matthias Corvinus too, at the beginning of his reign, had been obliged to try and fortify his own position,² and therefore, except for written protests, he had not resented the actions of Stephen. But after quelling the revolution of the Transylvanian nobles in 1467—a revolution which had been encouraged by Stephen³—he decided, as he had a numerous army at his disposal in Transylvania, to put an end to the conflict with him. Consequently, the first phase of Stephen's struggle with the Turks (for, after all, the occupation of Chilia was only a precautionary measure in view of the threatened Turkish invasion), was a war between the two states which were then the vanguards of Europe's resistance to the Turkish advance.

It was late in the season, for Matthias only reached Brasov on 11 November, and he had to act rapidly if he hoped for any result this year. He therefore advanced to Breț and Oituz,⁴ where he found the defile fortified and occupied by the Moldavians. If Matthias' chances of success lay in rapid action, it was in the interest of the Moldavians, whose forces were numerically inferior, not so well equipped, and composed of unprofessional soldiers, to avoid coming to immediate blows, and to wear out the Hungarian army.

Conforming to their traditional strategy, Stephen's forces, after resisting in the passes, slowly retired before their enemies, harassing them continually in their advance. Matthias followed the Moldavians and on the 19th occupied Trotus,⁵ then Bacău and, on 29 November, arrived at Roman; he had laid waste and

¹ *Annals of the Roumanian Academy*, Series III., Tom. VI., p. 31, note 4.

² Which necessitated long wars against his western neighbours (Csuday, *Geschichte der Ungarn* II., pp. 441-49).

³ Bonfinius, *Historia Pannonica* (Ed. Cologne, 1690), pp. 541, 546; Veress, *Fontes Rerum Transylvanicarum* IV., p. 5; Jorga, *Geschichte des Rumänischen Volkes* I., p. 344.

⁴ Veress, *op. cit.*, IV., pp. 23, 24; Bonfinius, *op. cit.*, p. 546.

⁵ Bogdan, *Cronice Inedite*, p. 52.

pillaged the whole country, but had not been able to force the ever evasive Moldavians to battle.

Every day that passed and every mile that they advanced weakened the Hungarian forces ; and the negotiations which, according to a Hungarian chronicler,¹ kept Matthias for seven days in Roman, must be interpreted as part of Stephen's plan to gain time. These negotiations brought no result, and on 7 December² Matthias left Roman, after setting it on fire, and followed Stephen on his voluntary retreat towards Suceava, the capital of the country.

On the evening of 14 December the Hungarians arrived at Baia,³ where they stopped for the night. Meanwhile Stephen's forces had concentrated in the forests north-east of that place and had occupied every way of access towards Suceava and of retreat towards Transylvania.⁴ The Hungarians had fallen into the trap Stephen had laid for them. After setting fire to the town, the Moldavians, on the night of the 14th, attacked concentrically, and utterly destroyed the Hungarian forces.⁵ Only very few, among them King Matthias himself, who was wounded in the back, escaped by unbeaten paths into Transylvania.⁶ For the following thirty-seven years of Stephen's reign not a Hungarian ever again crossed the Moldavian frontier as an enemy.

As has been shown at the beginning of this study, the cause of the Turco-Moldavian wars was, that, in the relations between the two countries, two civilisations were in collision, not merely different, but even opposite, and two opposite economic interests, for both sides needed the mastery of the Danube and Black Sea ports.

For Moldavia it was essential to be in possession of Chilia and Cetatea Albă, seeing that these ports were the termini of the route which united western and central Europe, through Lwów (Lemberg), with the Black Sea and that a very active exchange of goods between East and West was carried on through them. Moldavia profited through this exchange, by the custom duties, which brought money to the Treasury of the Prince, and by the

¹ Bonfinius, *op. cit.*, p. 546.

² Bogdan, *Cronice Inedite*, *loc. cit.*

³ Długosz, *op. cit.*, XIV., p. 496.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Bogdan, *Cronici inedite*, p. 52 ; Bogdan, *Vechile Cronici*, p. 195 ; Długosz, *op. cit.*, XIV., pp. 496, 517 ; Cromer, *Polonia* (Ed. Colonia 1589), p. 399.

⁶ Bogdan, *Cronici inedite* and *Vechile Cronici*, *loc. cit.* ; Veress, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-3, 5.

transport of goods, which enriched the inhabitants. On the other hand, the Turks could not profit to the full, as long as others were masters of the ports and shared in the benefits of the exchange.

But for them a powerful military reason was added to the economic necessity of having the mastery of the Danube, namely, that in order to be able to pursue their advance towards central Europe, they were obliged to use the Danube above Belgrade as a line of communication. This, however, they could not do, as long as their right flank was not guarded against attacks coming from Hungary, through Transylvania and Wallachia, or from Poland, through Moldavia. To safeguard this flank, they were obliged, firstly, to hold all the passages of the Danube, which necessitated the mastery of all fortresses on the left bank of the river; and secondly, to bring Moldavia and Wallachia under Turkish suzerainty or to weaken them, so as to prevent them from attacking, which would best be secured by the possession of the bridge-heads on the left bank.

Mohammed II., who was an able politician and strategist, did not try to continue the advance towards central Europe till he had accomplished these necessary tasks, and being occupied by wars with Skanderbeg, Venice and Uszun-Hassan, he did not attack the Roumanian Principalities at the beginning of his reign. Given the geographical situation, it was natural that the Turks should begin the conquest of the Danubian ports and the subjection of the Roumanian principalities by that of Wallachia, whose submission was assured after Mohammed's expedition in 1462.

On the other hand, Stephen could not tolerate the presence in Bucarest of Princes installed by the Turks or favourable to them. The reasons for this were as follows:

(a) Under the rule of these Princes, Wallachia assured to the Turks a very advantageous base for their operations and allowed them to cross the Danube without opposition, out of reach of Moldavian troops.

(b) The Turkish front of attack and consequently the Moldavian line of defence was thus increased by the space between the Pruth and the Carpathians.

(c) The Turkish army could find in Wallachia not only food, transport and auxiliary troops, but, above all, a good intelligence service and sure guides.

This was the cause of a series of wars between Moldavia and Wallachia in which Stephen, either alone or with the assistance of the Hungarians, drove away the Wallachian princes favourable

to the Turks and put in their place others, who either betrayed the Christian cause and became pro-Turks or, after Stephen had withdrawn his troops, were driven out by the Wallachians, aided by the Turks. The situation of the Wallachian princes was untenable, for in the existing circumstances they were obliged to take sides either for Stephen or for the Turks, while neither of these two protagonists then found it possible to keep Wallachia permanently occupied.¹

These small local wars, which had rather more the character of raids,² preceded and followed the Turco-Moldavian wars and obliged the Turks to keep troops permanently in readiness on the frontier. In 1475 the Turkish army, while besieging Scutari in Albania, was ordered by Mohammed II., in the middle of August,³ to march into Wallachia, where it re-enthroned Laiotă Basarab and then, in the last weeks of 1475, advanced towards Moldavia.⁴ A simultaneous attack by sea was unsuccessfully directed by the Turks against Chilia and Cetatea Albă. Stephen, well informed as he generally was, concentrated his own forces with some few Hungarians and Poles sent to help him, around Vaslui, where we know that on 29 November he was engaged in organising a powerful defensive position.⁵ The population of lower Moldavia was evacuated to the mountains, after having destroyed all that it could not take with it.⁶

In their advance the Turks, led by the Grand Vizier Suleiman, and accompanied by some Wallachian troops,⁷ came upon the Moldavian covering force, which gave way and slowly retreated, continually harassing the flanks and rear of the Turkish column and its convoys.⁸

The state of the roads impeded the advance of the Turks and increased the dearth of food, for the convoys marched at a still slower rate than the fighting forces. The Turks were thus

¹ Iorga, *Istoria lui Ștefan-cel-Mare*, p. 146.

² The Moldavians attacked the Wallachians in 1470, 1473, 1474, 1481, 1482, 1484, the Turks and Wallachians attacked in 1471, 1473, 1475, 1476, 1484, 1485, 1486.

³ Hammer, *Histoire de l'Empire Ottoman* (Ed. Dochez), I., p. 304.

⁴ Donado da Lezze, *Historia Turchesca* (Ed. Ursu), p. 83.

⁵ Stephen's letter to the Pope (Bogdan, *Documentele lui Ștefan-cel-Mare* II., p. 318); Iorga, *Acte și fragmente* III., p. 93.

⁶ Iorga, *op. cit.*, III., p. 87; Długosz, *op. cit.*, p. 621; Cromer, *op. cit.*, p. 418.

⁷ Bogdan, *Documentele lui Ștefan-cel-Mare*, II., pp. 319, 324, 340.

⁸ Contemporary narratives published by Iorga, *Acte și Fragmente*, III., pp. 92-97, and Veress (*Fontes Rerum Transylvanicarum*, IV., pp. 7-10), from which as well as from the Moldavian chronicles, published by Bogdan (*Vechile Cronici*, p. 196, and *Cronici Inedite*, p. 53), the above description is taken.

decoyed towards the position prepared by Stephen near Vaslui, in the valley of the Bârlad. Their vanguard suddenly came on this position, in the morning of 10 January, 1475, which was a very dark and misty day. Held up by the Moldavian troops, occupying the position, who heroically resisted their repeated assaults, the Turks were themselves attacked later in the day, and crushed by a powerful counter-offensive of the majority of Stephen's forces, which had been kept in reserve behind the left flank. Those who escaped this onslaught turned their backs and fled towards the Sereth and the Danube, closely pursued by the Moldavians, who, being mounted, covered 120 kilometres in two and a half days, killing very many of the enemy and capturing immense booty.¹ This defeat discouraged the Sultan, who for five days after receiving the news refused to see any one,² and his mother-in-law told the Venetian envoy that the Turks had not yet suffered such a defeat.³

Later Mohammed decided to take the offensive again the same year. Owing, however, to the war-like preparations of Matthias Corvinus, to a new attack by Uszun Hassan and to the Sultan's illness, this offensive did not take place in 1475, the Turkish operations being limited to the taking of Caffa (6 June) and Mangop (December) and to an unsuccessful attack (in the second half of June) on the Moldavian ports of Chilia and Cetatea Albă.⁴ Stephen knew very well that Mohammed was sure to renew the attack and consequently took the necessary measures, appealing also to the Pope and to his Polish and Hungarian neighbours. But except for the treaty of mutual help against a Turkish attack, which was signed between Stephen and Matthias Corvinus on 12 July, 1475,⁵ nothing came of all this except good words.

On 31 May, 1476, Sultan Mohammed started from Adrianople

¹ The Turkish losses in killed are estimated at from 45,000 (Italian and Austrian chronicles in Iorga, *op. cit.*) to 100,000 (Strykowski, "Kronika Polska" in Hâjdău *Arhiva Istorică a României*, II., pp. 10, 11). The Turkish chronicler Sead-ed-Din says that the majority of the Turks were killed (in Hâjdău, *op. cit.*, I., Part 2, p. 34). Many flags—of which 36 were sent to the Polish King (Drugosz, *op. cit.*, XIV., p. 622)—and many fire-arms were taken from the Turks.

² *Annali Veneti* (Stefano Magno) in Iorga, *Acte și Fragmente*, III., p. 87.

³ *Cronica de Venetia* (Domenico Malipiero) in Iorga, *op. cit.*, III., p. 84.

⁴ *Annali Veneti* in Iorga, *op. cit.*, III., p. 89.

⁵ Bogdan, *Documentele lui Ștefan-cel-Mare*, II., pp. 330–36. On 16 February the Hungarian troops led by Matthias took Sabatz and then raided Bosnia.

and went to Sofia, where the Turkish forces were assembling.¹ Thence some detachments were sent to demonstrate on the Hungarian frontier and the bulk of the army marched to Varna, where we know that the Sultan was present between 19 and 22 May, and where the Turks were waiting for the fleet which was to bring them their artillery and bridging material. On 29 May Stephen was in Jassy. To cover the Turkish advance, their fleet attacked Cetatea Albă and Chilia with the assistance of the Tartars, but was repulsed. At the same time the Wallachian Prince, Basarab Laiotă, made demonstrative attacks on the Moldavian southern frontier, and 30,000 Tartars attacked the north of Moldavia, in the direction of Stefanesti. Stephen, whose forces had been assembled between 5 and 8 June in Barlad, pushed forward towards the lower valley of the Sereth and then to the Danube. On hearing of the Tartar advance on northern Moldavia, he left a covering force on the Danube and marched north against the Tartars, whom he attacked unawares and drove over the Dniester.

Then the mass of the Moldavian army, the peasants, begged to be allowed to go and fetch food and put their families in safety. Stephen was reluctantly compelled to yield, giving them orders to join him on the Danube, towards which he marched with 10,000 men (nobles, guards and mercenaries), only to find that the Turks had already crossed the river at the beginning of July. In view of the new situation, Stephen ordered the entire population to evacuate the country and to seek refuge in the mountains, destroying in its retreat houses, crops and wells. He himself withdrew first to Vaslui.² Once across the Danube, the Turkish

¹ The documentation of this war is to be found in : Donado da Lezze, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-92 ; Lewicki, *Codex Epistolarius Saeculi decimi quinti*, III., p. 244 ; Katona, *Historia Critica Regum Hungariae*, XVI., p. 6 ; Długosz, *op. cit.*, XIV., pp. 643-45 ; Veress, *op. cit.*, IV., pp. 20-27 ; *Columna lui Traian*, VII., pp. 377-80 ; Cromer, *op. cit.*, p. 422 ; Bogdan, *Documentele lui Ștefan-cel-Mare*, II., pp. 340, 342, 348 ; *Monumenta Hungariae Historica (Acta Extera)*, V., pp. 323, 325 ; Sead-ed-Din's chronicle, cited above.

² That Stephen's plan of campaign was again based on wearing out the enemy and decoying him in a given direction, is proved by his letter to King Kasimir of Poland asking : " ut Rex duo millia peditum ad tuendum Byalogrodum et Kyliam, mitteret Russiae terra in armis esse, et circa Kamyenyecz statim agere iuberet ; solus ipse Rex ad succurrendum sibi, cum reliquo Regni Poloniae exercitu optatus subsequeretur. Ipsum illud assumpsisse propositum, et nullatenus universali dimicationi contra tam fortem et numerosum se committat : sed cedendo cum suis usque ad Kamyenyecz, hostem fallat et detineat " (Długosz, *op. cit.*, XIV., p. 627). The same plan was proposed in the negotiations with Matthias Corvinus (Veress, *op. cit.*, IV., p. 26).

forces united in the valley of the Sereth with those of the Wallachian prince and advanced along that valley towards Suceava. The advance was very difficult, as everything had been burned and no food was to be found. Cholera was ravaging the Turkish ranks and the Moldavians continually harassed the flanks of the advancing foe, who arrived on 24 July at Roman. Meanwhile Stephen, who had not yet been joined by his peasant soldiers (owing to the fact that he had appointed the rendezvous on the Danube), had gone from Vaslui to Bacău, thence to Roman and finally to Valea Albă, where he entrenched himself.

From this position he sallied forth on 25 July, and attacked the Turkish vanguard on its march towards Suceava. On the following day, the whole Turkish force, led by Mohammed II., attacked the Moldavian army and, after repeated assaults in which the Sultan himself took part, dispersed it; a part of it, with Stephen, found refuge in the mountains. After this success the Turkish forces overran the country and attacked the fortresses of Suceava, Neamt and Hotin, but without success.

Stephen had been defeated, but he was still at liberty, and he was thus able to assemble his peasantry, who had found him at last and under trying circumstances proved their attachment to him and showed their gratitude for the way he had ruled over them for nineteen years. At the same time the treaty signed with Matthias Corvinus had its effect, and the Hungarian army, led by Báthory, the Voevode of Transylvania, arrived at the beginning of August at Brețc, on the Moldavian frontier, from which point it could threaten the Turkish line of retreat. These circumstances, with the heat, the cholera and the lack of food, decided Mohammed during the first half of August to abandon the siege of Neamt and to retreat, an operation which was rapidly and skilfully carried out, though not without interference from the Moldavians, who overtook the Turks at the passage of the Danube and inflicted heavy losses on them.

Except for raids and petty fighting, necessitated by the continual changes on the Wallachian throne which we have already mentioned, no more serious fighting occurred between the Turks and Moldavians up to the death of Mohammed II. Mohammed's son and successor Bayazid, after concluding in 1484 an armistice of five years' duration with King Matthias¹ (an armistice which Stephen had reason to think also included Moldavia), attacked Chilia and Cetatea Albă by surprise the same year, and captured

¹ Correspondence between Matthias and the Sultan in Iorga, *Acte și Fragmente*, III., pp. 64-65; Veress, *op. cit.*, IV., pp. 39, 40.

both, from which time onwards these two cities remained in the hands of the Turks. Their possession enabled the Sultan's armies to attack Moldavia without difficulty, as they did in 1485, when on 16 November at Catlabuga near the Danube they were defeated by Stephen, and in 1486, when he again defeated them at Scheia near Roman on 6 March. Though Stephen was not again attacked by the Turks during the rest of his reign, Moldavia was henceforth in fact an Ottoman dependency, a position which it formally accepted after his death. Thus the right flank of the Turkish advance was secured, but their advance was not renewed until 1526.

The facts related in this sketch show that Moldavia, under the leadership of Stephen the Great, was one of the factors which contributed powerfully to delay and stem the Turkish advance during the seventy years which separated the victory of John Hunyády at Belgrade, from the disaster of Hungary at Mohacs.

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